Over 650 killed in Karachi violence

By Sarafraz Ahmed

KARACHI, Dec 31: Over 650 people were killed in political and sectarian violence during 1998 and the last quarter of the year saw the imposition of governor's rule in Sindh in which (Nov-Dec) the number of murders significantly ebbed at least in Karachi.

Those who were killed during the year included 126 activists of Muttahida Qaumi Movement, 67 of MQM-Haqiqi, 11 in sectarian violence, 39 police personnel, two rangers, two army jawans, seven PPP workers, and six workers of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League. The remaining 404 people were common citizens killed in politically-related violence.

Murders shot up in the year under review to over 965 from 689 in 1997. However, there was a slight decrease in the attempt to murder cases which declined to 638 from 647. The number of people killed in June, July and Oct was over 100 each and in Nov, Dec and February the figures stood at 37, 49 and 53, respectively.

Sixty-two of these murders were committed in January, 71 in March, 67 in April, 93 in May, 91 in August and 94 in September.

The last quarter of the year stood out for the efficiency of law enforcement agencies. According to the police, at least 56 high-profile cases were detected and scores of suspects involved in those cases had been apprehended.

The high-profile cases included that of Hakim Said, whose assassination proved to be the turning point in the political-administrative setup of the province, giving way for the imposition of governor's rule, followed by the setting up of military courts.

These military courts have so far announced judgments in five cases and the first conviction of death penalty was carried out on the last day of the year at Karachi Central Jail.

The other high-profile cases that have been detected by the police included those of the killing of KESC chief Shahid Hamid, Takbeer editor Salahuddin, MQM leader Azim Ahmed Tariq, secondary board chairman Ismail Memon, ex-MNA Zuhair Akram Nadeem, SDM-Khushk, PDSP Shamim, Sunni Tehrik leader Waheed Qadri, US drug enforcement agency man Shahnawaz Toor, DSP Farrukh Sultana, five relatives of SP Khwaja Nisar, and councillor Zaheeruddin Babar.

Most of the suspects involved in these cases, according to police, belong to the Muttahida Qaumi Movement.

The police claimed that around 1050 suspects had been arrested since the imposition of governor's rule, in addition to hundreds of others who had been picked up but later let off amid reports that police in various cases had extorted heavy bribes for their release.

The number of those belonging to Muttahida is 296, 90 are from Haqiqi and the rest from other groups. The MQM's maintains that Urdu-speaking people had been made target of harassment all over the country as they are segregated for checking at bus stops, railway stations and airports.

The MQM activists had been hauled up not only in Karachi, but in other parts of the country as well. They included five MQM activists who were taken into custody in Bajaur Agency and some others apprehended at Karachi airport. Those arrested at the airport included MQM activist Saulat Mirza, allegedly involved in the murder of scores of people.

The others from the MQM arrested include MPAs Shoaib Bokhari and Wakeel Jamali, who were taken into custody at the MQM's MPA Hostel from where, the police claims, arms were recovered.

Since the imposition of governor's rule, a good quantity of illicit arms and ammunition was recovered, according to police. The list of arms and ammunition seized till Dec 27 comprises two LMGs, 78 KKs, 65 rifles, 515 pistols, 69 revolvers, 12 shot-guns, 27 mousers, 17 hand-grenades, two rocket launchers, one booster and four rockets.

In August the city witnessed a three-day strike called by Muttahida Qaumi Movement to protest against the killing of its sector-in-charge of Gulshan-i-Iqbal. The main feature of the protest was the burning of around 70 vehicles in various parts of the city. Besides, on various occasions throughout the year, vehicles were set ablaze on the protest calls by various political and sectarian parties.

As far as Hakim Said's case is concerned, the police have arrested at least 10 suspects from among 22 who, according to the authorities, had been directly or indirectly involved in the murder of the former Sindh governor.

A wave of gloom pervaded the entire country following the murder of Hakim Said. It was first time in the history of the country that prime minister on the basis of preliminary investigations carried out by police and other agencies held the PML coalition partners MQM's men responsible for the murder at a press conference.

At least two suspects in the case died in police custody. They were MQM activist Fasih Ahmed, who died because of injuries he suffered during interrogation, and Mubashir Ali, a recruiting agent. The police have claimed that the latter suspect died of heart attack while the medico-legal department of the hospital concerned has reserved cause of death until it has received the chemical examination report.

The Hakim Said case is now being finalised by the police before it is sent to military court for trial. The police have so far recommended 40 cases for trial by the military courts.

According to police the Hakim Said case was taking time because some prime suspects in the case such as MPA Zulfikar Haider, former ASI Naushad, Ajmal Pahari were still at large.

Nevertheless, the police with the arrest of the MQM's Burns Road sector-in-charge, Shakir Langra, which was preceded with the recovery of arms which, according to the police, were used in the killing, in a nullah at Burns Road, now finds the case fit to be sent to a military court in the near future.

The other significant murders during 1998 were included those of secondary board chairman Ismail Memon, former MNA Zuhair Akram Nadeem and Sunni Tehreek leader Maulana Waheed Qadri. According to police claims, those who have committed the murders belong to Muttahida Qaumi Movement.